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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TAIPEI 002638

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SUBJECT: "THREE-IN-ONE" ELECTION: TAIWAN PARES DOWN AND
GEARS UP FOR DECEMBER ELECTIONS

REF: TAIPEI 2490

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas H. Paal, Reason 1.4 b

[11.](#) (SBU) Summary. Prompted by voter weariness over Taiwan's plethora of elections, the Executive Yuan (EY) announced that the December city/county magistrate election will be combined with two other local elections. These elections should indicate where Taiwan's fragmented political party system is going after the constitutional revisions passed last week, in particular whether the rickety Pan-Blue and Pan-Green alliances might coalesce into a predominantly two-party political system. The elections may also be an early bellwether of political trends and party organization on the road to the combined presidential-legislative election in March 2008. End Summary.

Combating Electoral Ennui

[12.](#) (U) Rising voter impatience over Taiwan's overloaded election calendar -- this is the second year in a row with two major island-wide elections -- compounded by the historically low 23 percent voter turn-out in the May 14 National Assembly election, convinced the government to reconfigure the series of elections facing Taiwan over the next year. On June 8, the Central Election Commission (CEC) formally announced that the city mayor/county magistrate elections will be held on December 3, and these will be combined into a single island-wide election with county council and township elections originally scheduled for 2006. The CEC explained that most voters support this combination to simplify voting and reduce costs. The most significant elections will be for the 23 city mayors and county magistrates, which many observers see as an early indicator of party and leadership trends for the likely combined presidential-legislative elections in late 2007/early 2008. The December elections will include all 18 counties and five municipalities -- Keelung, Hsinchu, Taichung, Chiayi, and Tainan. (Note: Elections for "Special Municipalities" Taipei and Kaohsiung will be held separately in late 2006.)

[13.](#) (C) Premier Frank Hsieh (Chang-ting) failed in his earlier, March 2005, effort to push through this three-in-one reform to rationalize and simplify Taiwan's complex, multi-layered election system. The outrage his proposal stirred among entrenched politicians, not least within his own Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), forced him to retrench and stop pushing the idea. DPP legislators at the time told AIT that the new DPP Chairman, Su Tseng-chang -- Hsieh's foremost competitor for the 2008 DPP presidential nomination -- saw this as an early 2008 campaign thrust by Hsieh to undermine him (Su) and push him from the political limelight. The unprecedentedly low voter turn-out on May 14, however, DPP Deputy SecGen Yan Wan-chin told AIT, renewed momentum for Hsieh's drive to simplify Taiwan's election system and encourage higher voter turn-out. By this time, Yan noted, Chairman Su had an election victory (May 14) under his belt and was more amenable to the combination idea (besides which, President Chen made it clear that he was fully on board). So, the CEC moved immediately following the National Assembly to announce the change.

Out of the Starting Block

[14.](#) (C) The four major political parties -- DPP, Kuomintang (KMT), People First Party (PFP), and Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU), are moving to nominate candidates for the city/county magistrate elections (local party organizations will handle council and local elections):

-- DPP: Has announced a slate of 16 candidates -- 10 uncontested and 6 via the DPP's unique primary system (a blend of direct voting and public opinion polls, worth 30 and 70 percent, respectively). For the remaining 7 races, the DPP is deliberating whether to nominate its own candidates for traditionally span-blue8 districts (Hsinchu, Miaoli, Hualian, Kinmen and Lienchiang Counties and Keelung City) or "give" these to its coalition partner, TSU.

-- TSU: Is going slow on candidate selection pending discussions with DPP following the DPP announcement of its candidate slate.
-- KMT: Is nominating in three tranches, beginning with traditional KMT "top-down" candidate selection and ending with a new primary system modeled on that of the DPP. (Note: DPP Deputy SecGen Yan exulted to AIT that the KMT "is copying our primary system of direct voting and public opinion polling." End Note.) After the KMT announces its final group of candidates on June 22, it will begin discussing possible candidate coordination with the PFP.

-- PFP: Has nominated seven candidates; PFP SecGen Chin Chin-sheng told AIT the party will probably make more nominations in the days ahead, pending the results of his ongoing discussions with KMT SecGen Lin Feng-cheng. Indicative of the PFP desire for Pan-Blue coordination, immediately after announcement of their candidacy, the seven PFP candidates called for PFP-KMT election coordination.

A Question of Cooperation

15. (C) Each party is also jockeying for position with its respective coalition partner -- Pan-Green's DPP and TSU, and Pan-Blue's KMT and PFP. While both coalitions fractured after the December 2004 legislative elections, the constitutional revisions approved by the National Assembly on June 7, which will marginalize small political parties (see ref A), have inspired renewed TSU and PFP interest in cooperating with their coalition partners. The first such public discussions by legislators from these two parties, in fact, occurred on May 29, the day before the National Assembly opened.

16. (C) DPP Deputy SecGen Yan told AIT that DPP intends to cooperate with the TSU to ensure only one Pan-Green candidate runs in each race on December 3, though the TSU threat to run Annie Lee for Taipei County Magistrate indicates TSU is less than confident about the promised cooperation. PFP SecGen Chin told AIT that he is working with KMT SecGen Lin Feng-cheng on possible cooperation on the December 3 elections, though it is too early to tell whether this will work out, he noted, particularly given Lin's insistence that discussions begin only after all KMT nominations are announced June 22. Chin noted that the chances of PFP-KMT cooperation might increase after the July 17 KMT Chair election, referring to candidate Wang Jin-pyng's statement that his top priority as Chair will be to coalesce with the PFP.

Comment: Taiwan's Emerging Political Style

17. (C) The historically low voter turn-out in the May 14 National Assembly election was decisive in advancing one of Premier Hsieh's reform agendas -- reducing the excessive number of elections in Taiwan. The composite "three-in-one" December 3 election will be the first indicator of Taiwan's new post-constitutional reform political landscape. Seeing the handwriting on the wall of impending marginalization, TSU and PFP have become noticeably more eager to reach accommodations toward their respective coalition partners. KMT and DPP, on the other hand, are playing it coy, presumably sensing desperation in their junior partners. While the PFP can still pull votes from the KMT, its precipitous decline (from 18 percent approval ratings in 2001 to 6 percent vote on May 14) has reduced its appeal and given the KMT greater leverage in the relationship. Nevertheless, both TSU and PFP have enough political "stars" remaining in their candidate portfolio to play havoc with their coalition partners on December 3. In Keelung City, for example, KMT-PFP non-cooperation on a single mayoral candidate would probably repeat the 1997 scenario in which each candidate "killed off" the other, leaving a weak DPP candidate with the win. At this still early date, however, KMT and DPP appear only willing to give dubious "gifts" to their coalition partners -- DPP, for example, wants to "give" TSU the Pan-Green slot for Jinmen and Matsu magistracies, both solid "Blue" territory. In response, TSU is threatening to run former President Lee Teng-hui's daughter, Annie Lee, for magistrate in the December 3 "crown jewel" -- Taipei County.

18. (C) The December 3 elections may also be an early bellwether for Taiwan's 2007/2008 presidential-legislative election campaign. An important factor in the run up to the presidential-legislative election will be party leadership. DPP is led by its highly organized, charismatic SecGen, Su Tseng-chang, who saved his political hide and even burnished

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his party credentials by pulling victory out of near-certain defeat for the DPP on May 14. On the other hand, KMT chances in December will have a major impact on the future political strength of whoever is elected its Chairman on July 17.

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